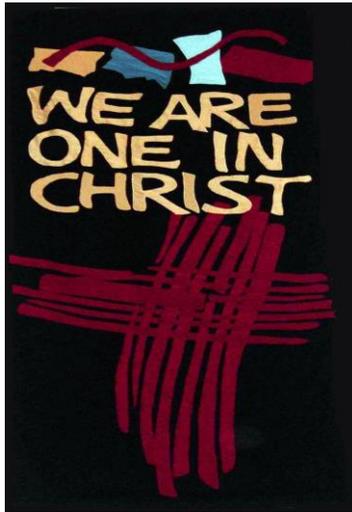


ST. JOHN UCC
Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 16, 2021



Together as One

St. John United Church of Christ

10207 Lincoln Trail

Fairview Heights, IL 62208

Telephone 397-6323

Secretary – Judy Hartman

Rev. Rosemary Captain

Prayers and Liturgy by

Rev. Dr. Sheila Harvey Guillaume

Organist – Sharon Banjavcic

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 Psalm 1 1 John 5:9-13 John 17:6-19

WORDS OF WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRELUDE: “A Joyous Acclamation” Lani Smith

CALL TO WORSHIP:

We come and seek the ways of wisdom.

We come as one Body in Christ.

We come to find peace and sing songs of love.

We come to be refreshed by the Spirit.

Come, let us worship.

INVOCATION:

Life-giving God, your love and light guides us on the path of courage, compassion, generosity, and grace. Lead us we seek to follow your transformative love that turns sorrow into joy, and despair into hope. O God, help us embrace your guiding love that calls us to live as your faithful witnesses, who reflect your grace and redemptive love.

God, open hearts to receive your gracious love, and strengthen us to carry the Good News of your healing power found in the light, love and life of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Gracious God, we confess our doubts that stifle our joy. Forgive us when we lack faith in you, and comfort us when our fears outweigh our praise. God, forgive us when we fail to trust you, and help us when we do not live as your faithful witnesses. Guiding God, forgive us when we are self-consumed and lack the time needed to serve our neighbors.

**In these times, have mercy on us, O God,
and encourage us to be your love-lived,
by renewing us daily in your strength. We pray, Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

O God, hear our prayers of confession and forgiveness,
and guide us from disbelief and distress
by leading us into your hope-filled joy.

God, we need your loving Spirit
to be among us, to comfort us in our doubt,
and to strengthen us in our faith. Amen.

GLORIA PATRI: Music only

Glory to the Creator, the Christ,
the Holy Spirit, Three-in-One,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world
without end. Amen. Amen.

HYMN: “Nearer My God to Thee”

SCRIPTURE: We’ve been reading Jesus’s last instructions to
his disciples before he is arrested. Now Jesus turns to pray
to God, his Father. We are listening to this conversation in
John 17:6-19. What do you think they will talk about?

⁶ “I have revealed your name to the people you gave me
from this world. They were yours and you gave them to me,
and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that
everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ This is
because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they
received them. They truly understood that I came from you,
and they believed that you sent me.

⁹ “I’m praying for them. I’m not praying for the world but
for those you gave me, because they are yours.

¹⁰ Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is
yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ I’m no longer
in the world, but they are in the world, even as I’m coming
to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the
name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are
one.

¹² When I was with them, I watched over them in your
name, the name you gave to me, and I kept them safe.
None of them were lost, except the one who was destined
for destruction, so that scripture would be fulfilled. ¹³ Now
I’m coming to you and I say these things while I’m in the
world so that they can share completely in my joy. ¹⁴ I gave
your word to them and the world hated them, because they
don’t belong to this world, just as I don’t belong to this
world. ¹⁵ I’m not asking that you take them out of this world
but that you keep them safe from the evil one.

¹⁶ They don’t belong to this world, just as I don’t belong to
this world. ¹⁷ Make them holy in the truth; your word is
truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them
into the world. ¹⁹ I made myself holy on their behalf so that
they also would be made holy in the truth.”

These are the Ancient Words given to us
so that we may hear them anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “The Work God is Calling Us to Continue”

My first impression of this text is that it sounds like an exit interview like when you are leaving a job. For example; I say what I’ve have done, what I accomplished. How those I managed have done. I talk about how my team will continue after I’m gone.

Jesus is having such a conversation with God. “I have taught the disciples all about you, God. You gave them to me. They have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me came from you. I gave them the words you gave me. They believe I came from you and that you sent me. I’m praying for them. Not the world they live in, but for those you gave me because they are yours.

As usual, I have questions about this scripture text. I’ll start with the very first verse. Some bible translations say “I have made you known to the disciples.” I read revealed your name to the ones you gave me from this world.”

Does that mean people at that time did not know God at all? Yes and no.

In the old testament, *name*, is used in a very special way. It does not mean simply the name by which a person is called; it means the whole character of the person in so far as it can be known.

Additionally, when the Jews spoke of *the name of God* they meant the sacred four letter symbol, IHWH. That name was held to be so sacred that it was never pronounced, except by the high priest when he went into the holy of holies on the day of atonement.

So ordinary people were not ever supposed to know it, far less speak it. So, Jesus is now saying: “I have told you

God’s name; that name which is so sacred can now be spoken, all because of what I have done. I have brought the remote, invisible God so close that even ordinary mortals can speak to God and take God’s name upon their lips.”

It is Jesus’ great claim that he showed the true nature and the true character of God; and that he brought God so close that the humblest Christians can take God’s unutterable name upon their lips.

God is not a vengeful God who resides far away and makes the rain and earthquakes whenever God feels like it. Jesus came to teach the true character of God who loves, forgives, and cares about all of us.

We are so fortunate that we were never taught to be silent to God. It’s so refreshing and comforting that we can talk to God any time about anything.

The next word I had questions about was the word “world”. Verse 11 Jesus says “and now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you, God.”

Jesus begins this text by saying that he does not pray for the world; and yet he came because God so loved the world. But as we have seen, in the Gospel of John, “the world” stands for “human society organizing itself without God.”

What Jesus does for the world is to send out his disciples into it, in order to lead it back to God and to make it aware of God. He prays for his disciples in order that they may be such a presence as to win the world for him.

Jesus has a sense of mission for the world and this becomes the subject later in this prayer in verses 21, 23,

but he begins his prayer with a focus on his own (the disciples) who remain in the world.

The language of “belonging” or “abiding” or “remaining” comes to the fore in the verses that follow. Those who follow Jesus belong to God, “they do not belong to the world” in verse 14.

Again, the Gospel of John defines the “world” as a “human society organizing itself without God.” This is also true of “the evil one”. The evil one is the embodiment of all that is opposed to God. The disciples, and us, will live and work in the midst of this opposition. Jesus prays for God’s protection because of the realities that believers face living in the “world.”

There are two other words that come up in some translations. Words you probably don’t use in every day conversation.

The first is “glorification”. The Gospel of John uses this word to describe the revelation of God’s love that takes place in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

By glorifying God, Jesus makes visible the presence of God; thus, Jesus’ glorification also glorifies God. At this point in the story, Jesus’ prayer for his glorification is also a prayer that the events of his hour will complete his revelation of God. Jesus has glorified God by finishing the work God gave him to do and asks God to glorify him in return.

An example of this might be something like, you had surgery and it all went well, so you tell your friends how great your surgeon was. You glorify your surgeon’s name so he will be known by others. We could say the same thing about a good car mechanic.

Another word that comes up in some translations is the word “sanctify”. In Verse 17 Jesus prays for the disciples’ protection, but it is also a prayer “to sanctify them in truth.” To sanctify is to set apart to do God’s work in the world. Jesus commissions the community to work in the world - notably, in the same way that God has commissioned Jesus.

“Sanctify” also means “holy”. In the New Living Translation, verse 17 reads “make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.”

So, we have learned some terms that we needed some clarification on.

Learning a *name*, means the whole character of the person in so far as it can be known.

The *world* as “human society organizing itself without God.” The evil one is the embodiment of all that is opposed to God.

“Glorification”. The Gospel of John uses this word to describe the revelation of God’s love that takes place in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. By glorifying God, Jesus makes visible the very presence of God .

To sanctify is to be set apart to do God’s work in the world. A commission.

To me, the most important think in this scripture is the word “work”. We frequently read that we are to carry on the work of Jesus and God. What work are they talking about? What are we supposed to do?

The answer is right there in verse 6.

We are to make God known in the world. Not just God’s name but the very character of God. If you prefer a different word, then “reveal” God to as many people as you can.

Before his arrest, these are the last words he spoke to his Father.

²⁵ “Righteous Father, even the world didn’t know you, but I’ve known you, and these believers know that you sent me. ²⁶ I’ve made your name known to them and will continue to make it known so that your love for me will be in them, and I myself will be in them Amen.

MUSIC: “THERE IS NONE LIKE YOU”

PASTORAL PRAYER: The work you are giving us, dear God, is to make you known to everyone we meet, and friends we haven’t met yet. It’s that simple. We are to let the rest of the world know who God is and the wonderful life we can have loving God and following the teachings of Jesus. Why do we resist? Give us courage as you send your Holy Spirit on each of us to continue this work.

Hear our prayers for all who search for new cures for disease and surgical techniques. Bless nurses, doctors, and technicians who minister to our sick and care for the aged in hospitals and nursing homes. Especially bless those who are in hospices that their dying may be completed with the least suffering and with spiritual comfort from chaplains and staff.

Heavenly Father, we believe that you have granted the desire of your Holy Son Jesus, that those whom you have given him should be praised for continuing to spread the good news of the Gospel far and wide.

Merciful Holy One, your love is being brought to perfection within us through our need to seek and grant forgiveness, through our search for the full and true meaning of your Word, in the struggle to understand one

another and overcome misunderstanding. For every discovery of new kinship in the Spirit, we rejoice with great joy, as your family continues to grow locally and internationally. All praise to you, all-loving God.

THE LORD’S PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING: Thank you for sharing your gifts, even all through this pandemic. We have been able to keep the lights on and minister via letters, phone calls, and Zoom. Thank you.

DOXOLOGY:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

Dear God, We offer our generous gifts as a sign of our gratitude for creating us to care for one another. We pray your blessings upon these gifts, and hope they serve as our love for you and the world. Redeeming God, we ask that these gracious offerings be a witness to your healing and faithful love in order to bring hope to a hurting world. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Let us go forth in the world, giving thanks that we have come.

Let us go forth renewed in spirit, knowing that we belong to God.

And, let us go forth as witnesses, carrying the light of Jesus Christ. Amen.

POSTLUDE: “Surely Goodness and Mercy” Roger C. Wilson

CONDOLENCES TO the family and friends of Allan Pickens.

PLAYER LIST: We pray for the health and well-being of all affected by the pandemic and we especially pray for:

Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, P.J. Bennett, Nelson Libell, Joe Knapp, Jim Garrett, Durrelene, Marlene, Kathy and Linda (friends of Jackie Canterbury), Ronald Bopp (husband of Pastor’s friend), Agnes Doctolero.